

# **Tule Mountain**

*CA-020-211*

## TULE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

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### 1. THE STUDY AREA ---

17,860 acres

The Tule Mountain WSA is located in northeastern Lassen County, California with approximately 750 acres lying in southern Modoc County. The WSA is located twenty-five miles south of Alturas, California on the east side of U.S. Highway 395. The WSA includes 16,998 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and 862 acres of private inholdings (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA is roughly diamond-shaped. The northeastern boundary is an annually maintained dirt road known as the Tule Mountain Access Road. There are four places along this boundary where the WSA line deviates from the access road to exclude private land which intrude into the WSA. The southeastern boundary is an unimproved dirt road from McKabe Flat to the north end of Moon Lake continuing along the northwest shoreline to the south end of the WSA. The entire western boundary is a maintenance road which parallels the Southern Pacific Railroad. There are four exceptions along the boundary where private lands intrude into the WSA and the boundary is drawn to exclude these from the WSA.

The main feature of the WSA is a rounded mountain with its apex approximately centered in the unit. Elevation ranges from 4900' to 7098' which is the highest point of BLM land in the Alturas Resource Area. The mountain is drained by many shallow, intermittent drainages that are dry for most of the year. The WSA is in the sagebrush steppe ecotype with sagebrush-juniper being the dominant vegetative community. Upper elevations include approximately 150 acres of white fir/Jeffrey pine classified as commercial timber land.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Alturas Resource Area Final Environmental Impact Statement of 1987. Two different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EIS: an all-wilderness alternative and a no-wilderness alternative.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -

0	acres recommended for wilderness
16,998	BLM acres recommended for non-wilderness

No wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in this WSA is released for uses other than wilderness. The all-wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally-preferred alternative as

it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The no-wilderness alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

Though the wilderness values described in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act are present in the WSA, the values were not considered of high enough quality to warrant wilderness designation. The WSA does not contain any significant single feature or combination of features such as vegetation, topography, wildlife, geology, or cultural and historic features. The sagebrush and juniper covered slopes are common to the area. Tule Mountain is similar to many other locations nearby. Shinn Peaks, Likely Mountain, McDonald Peak and many other nearby hills are similar in their appearance, differing only in that they have more roads or other man-made disturbances. There is nothing out of the ordinary that would distinguish Tule Mountain and make it a worthwhile addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS).

The WSA is mostly natural with the exception of numerous ways. The unit is nearly bisected by the two cherrystemmed roads both going to the top of Tule Mountain. The two roads come within less than one-half mile of meeting. There are approximately 20 miles of routes of travel including primitive ways, washes and other unmaintained routes of access which will remain available for vehicular use. It is expected to remain in a relatively natural condition regardless of wilderness designation due to lack of resource demands. Resource conflicts were not a factor in the non-suitable recommendation.

Visitor use is low in the WSA with the exception of seasonal use for mule deer and upland game hunting opportunities. The low visitor use reflects the lack of variety and diversity of recreational opportunities as well as lack of special features.



TABLE 1 - Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	16,998
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		862
Total		17,860
<u>Within Recommended Wilderness Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	0
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		0
Inholdings		<u>Acres</u>
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	16,998
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		16,998

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The WSA is essentially natural in character. Naturalness is somewhat impaired by the presence of eight ways with a sum total of 20 miles in length. There are also 24 small livestock stock ponds and approximately two miles of hand-cut fireline. Two cherrystemmed roads identified during the wilderness inventory penetrate the WSA from the east and west boundaries and end within one-half mile of each other near the center of the unit. Each of these roads is approximately three miles in length. Although they are technically outside the WSA, they nearly bisect the unit. Topographic and vegetative screening absorb enough of these impacts that, on the whole, the area retains its natural character.
2. Solitude: The size of the WSA lends itself to achieving a feeling of solitude. Topographic and vegetative screening serve to enhance the ability of a visitor to find seclusion from other

visitors to the area. With the exception of infrequent maintenance of range improvement and off-highway vehicle use on the numerous ways, there are no activities within the WSA which would detract from the solitude a visitor would experience. The viewshed from the mountain includes the towns of Likely and Madeline, U.S. Highway 395, and a now inactive Southern Pacific Railroad line. Sounds of the highway are audible from much of the WSA.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission taking place in approved military operating areas and flight corridors. The visual intrusions and associated noise create periodic temporary effects on solitude which are deemed necessary and acceptable as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Large size, topography, and vegetation provide opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation such as hiking, horseback riding, hunting, etc. The area does not possess any unique natural features, diverse or challenging terrain to provide outstanding recreation opportunities. Very little non-motorized recreational use of the area has been observed.
4. Special Features: The WSA contains no special features.

B. Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

1. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems: This WSA contains 16,998 acres of the Intermountain Sagebrush/Sagebrush Steppe ecosystem. The Tule Mountain WSA would not be a significant addition to the diversity of the NWPS.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Province/PNV	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BIM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Sagebrush Steppe	3	76,699	136	4,353,342
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Sagebrush Steppe	1	31,295	4	135,433

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of six major metropolitan areas. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population centers.

Table 3 - Wilderness Opportunities for Residents of Major Population Centers

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Sacramento	46	5,001,817	87	2,479,541
Redding	14	1,236,503	11	344,633
Chico	16	1,286,873	13	430,822
Yuba City	44	4,951,805	85	2,459,500
<u>Oregon</u>				
Medford	31	2,440,081	21	730,038
<u>Nevada</u>				
Reno	39	4,647,230	175	6,904,809

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: There is one existing unit of the NWPS within 50 air miles of the Tule Mountain WSA. The unit is the South Warner Wilderness managed by the USFS. There are seven other recommended suitable BLM WSA's within 50 air miles of Tule Mountain WSA: Pit River Canyon, Tunnison Mountain, Skedaddle Mountain, Dry Valley Rim, Twin Peaks, High Rock Canyon, and Massacre Rim.

#### C. Manageability

The Tule Mountain WSA is manageable as wilderness, although some management problems do exist. The WSA contains four inholding parcels totalling 862 acres. These parcels are grazing land that have a few range improvement facilities such as stock ponds, spring developments, and windmills. Use of these lands is not likely to change in the near future; however, landowners will want to maintain access using existing ways as vehicular access to maintain and improve existing facilities on their lands.

Though road closures could be implemented on the 20 miles of existing ways in the WSA, an estimated 75% of the closures would be ineffective at preventing continuing vehicle use. This is especially true during



the deer season. In most areas cross-country access is not adequately restricted by terrain to prevent circumventing road barriers. Solitude and naturalness would continue to be subject to impairment despite management efforts.

Military overflights in this WSA must be considered to maintain the integrity of the existing and future national defense mission as well as the wilderness resource.

D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of information known at time of preliminary suitable recommendation: The geology and mineralization of the Tule Mountain WSA is described in the Alturas Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP) completed December 5, 1983. The WSA contains commercial flat rock. The occurrence of medium to fine grained basalt that weathers into flat plates 1.5 to 4 inches thick was documented near the top of Tule Mountain.

Unknown potential Geology-Energy-Mineral (GEM) resources may exist within the WSA for geothermal or hot water resources. Two areas outside the WSA but within a quarter mile of the WSA boundary contain warm springs (S1/2 sec. 22, T. 39 N., R. 13 E., and NE1/4 sec. 6, T. 38 N. R. 14 E.) A region of geothermal potential includes the north half of the WSA.

The mineral potential of this area is low. The basalt found near the top of Tule Mountain could be used as a decorative stone called flat rock or lava moss rock, but this deposit has not been exploited due to poor access and because flat rock is available from other locations. The geothermal resources in this area could be used for direct heat, but there are no known geothermal resources considered hot enough for power generation.

There are no existing mining claims.

Approximately 1,600 acres were under lease for oil and gas. These are highly speculative as potential for discovery or production is considered very low.

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since suitability recommendation which should be considered in the final recommendation: Since the area was recommended as non-suitable for wilderness designation there were no mineral surveys conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Mines and/or the U.S. Geological Survey. The two non-competitive oil and gas leases have been terminated due to nonpayment. A search of BLM records on March 25, 1988 indicated that there are no mining claims or mineral leases in the WSA.



BLM has not received any new information from any source about mineral resources since the final EIS was published. Because of low potential for mineral resources no mineral potential map was prepared for this WSA.

E. Impacts on Resources

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCE	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Wilderness Values	There would be slight to minor impacts on naturalness, solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation throughout the WSA except for short-term and localized adverse impacts. Continued motorized recreation use (1,100 visitor days) would result in a minor impact to naturalness as well as short-term moderate impact to solitude during the two week deer hunting season. The prescribed burn would have a minor short-term impact on naturalness within the 2,000-acre burn area with minor impacts to solitude over the three day operation. Timber harvesting would impair naturalness within a 151 acre area and disrupt solitude for two months every 20 to 30 years. Other activities including fuelwood harvesting and maintenance of existing livestock facilities would result in negligible to minor localized impacts particularly to solitude.	Wilderness designation would have a slight benefit on wilderness values. As a result of precluding existing motorized recreation use, timber harvesting, and fuelwood cutting wilderness values would be retained and slightly enhanced, particularly naturalness and solitude. Additionally, long-term protection from unanticipated future actions that could result in potential adverse impacts would be provided.
Motorized Recreation Use	There would be no impact on motorized recreation use in the WSA. The current 1,100 days of motorized recreation use would remain stable with the entire WSA open to motorized vehicle use including 20 miles of primitive vehicle	Motorized recreation use totalling 1,000 visitor days would be foregone. This would result in a minor impact as the WSA would continue to have vehicle access, particularly for hunting, available around the perimeter from boundary

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (Cont'd)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCE	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Motorized Recreation Use (Cont'd)	use including 20 miles of primitive vehicle routes.	roads and from six miles of cherry stemmed roads which penetrate the central portion of the WSA.
Livestock Grazing and Range Improvements	There would be no impact on livestock grazing and range improvements. A 2,000-acre prescribed burn would be per- mitted resulting in an in- crease of 66 AUMs for a projected total of 2,636 AUMs.	An increase of 66 AUMs, or less than three percent of the current 2,570 AUMs allotted within the WSA would be foregone as a re- sult of precluding a pro- posed 2,000-acre prescribed burn. This would result in a slight impact on livestock grazing and range improve- ments.

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Therefore no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Comments

A total of 67 comments were submitted, both oral and written, on the Alturas Resource Area draft resource management plan and environmental impact statement during the 90-day public comment period which ended July 15, 1983. Of the 67 comments, 55 made some reference to the wilderness portion of the RMP. A formal hearing was announced through a news release, personal communication and the Federal Register on April 20, 1983.

Of the 55 written and oral comments received for the record, four indicated approval of the BLM DEIS Preferred Alternative in whole or part. Forty-seven recommended the All-Wilderness Alternative. One response recommended the No-Wilderness Alternative. Two comments proposed boundary modifications for the Tule Mountain WSA. One comment took no position but questioned the overall adequacy of the entire document including wilderness.

Most of those favoring wilderness designation believed there are not enough areas being protected to preserve their wilderness values. Following are the more common reasons given in support of wilderness designation for Tule Mountain: It will provide maximum protection of vegetation, including riparian areas; it provides habitat for mammal

and raptor species; archaeological sites will be protected; lack of resource conflicts; the area adds diversity to the California Wilderness System; and it preserves primitive recreational opportunities.

Those supporting the preferred alternative believe the concerns for resources, local economic, and wilderness are in proper balance. No comments on the draft EIS were received from other government agencies which pertained to wilderness.